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Source: *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jul., 1934), pp. 1-9

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1488889>

Accessed: 01/07/2013 02:39

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PEABODY JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 12

JULY, 1934

NUMBER 1

OUR DIMENSIONAL CIVILIZATION AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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The chief business of good citizens today is to discover ways and means of preserving and developing our cultural inheritance. Whatever material loss individuals and institutions have suffered, or may yet suffer, they are inconsequential as compared with the threatened disruption and destruction of our civilizing processes. Usable goods, of whatever kind, are easily created and accumulate with rapidity when intelligence and virtue are widely and generously diffused among the people. Likewise, they perish or are consumed with equal facility in the presence of either ignorance or enlightenment. Not only is this true, but material values sometimes fluctuate widely and wildly on the slightest provocation and refuse to be controlled by any available human authority.

In short, wealth as we commonly think of it, has no dependably abiding values. It is only a means to an end—to be sure, a valuable and desirable means, but never an end. Hence it is that the collapse of our civilization is fore-shadowed not in bank failures and mortgage foreclosures, but in our cultural poverty. The business ruin about us is only the measly eruptions of a more fundamental and internal disorder. Our real danger is to be found in our low appreciation of the abiding values of life. This is the reason why every good citizen today, regardless of vocation, rank, color, religious faith, or political affiliation should give mighty support to those institutions and causes which cultivate the intelligence, give quality to the emotions, and improve the ideals of our people. This conference is predicated upon the desire and purpose in a few hearts to conserve the invisible and dimensionless values that constitute the soul of all great civilizations. We are met to find ways and means, in our small way, of saving and improving one of the chief instruments of American culture—the public school.

There is no disloyalty in recognizing the fact that the faith of our people in the traditional American concepts and ways of life has been severely

shocked. The principles of the Declaration of Independence and of our national constitution are being freely renounced in favor of an antiquated European system that denies the capacity of man, under any circumstance, for self-government. Only a few days ago, I am told, a prominent American citizen stood before one of the largest and most influential service clubs in this country and advocated the abandonment of our democratic ideals and the substitution therefor of an aristocratic form of government. His address was said to have been received with high praise. Unquestionably the democratic way of life is on trial in this country, and the public school is the chief bulwark of defense. If education can adjust itself to the demands of the New Day and withstand the attack of its enemies, then American political and social ideals and traditions will probably continue to function toward an improved civilization, and America will continue to lead the world toward higher freedom.

Now it seems to me that much of the unfaith in our democratic principles may be accounted for by the fact that certain false notions and ideals have crept into our common life. Among these, I am now thinking of our very general disposition to evaluate all things by their physical dimensions. Perhaps it was inevitable that such should be the case. The New World to which our forefathers came presented an impressive array of magnitudes—a continent of unknown expanse, forests of impenetrable depths, mountains of surpassing height, rivers of unbelievable length, natural resources of endless variety and inexhaustible supply—all combining to afford opportunities for self-expression hitherto undreamed of by man. As the years came and went, Americans developed habits of a new and constantly expanding freedom that gave life largeness and volume. In the course of time they successfully joined arms with the most powerful nation in the world and set up a government as comprehensive as human rights. With astounding rapidity they subdued, occupied, and gave political organization to the heart of the North American continent. Through unsurpassed energy, intelligence, and courage, they developed field, forest, and mine to become the world's greatest producer of raw material; and hungry mouths the world over cry for their sustenance. Through scientific invention and discovery plus an almost uncanny genius for the organization and production of wealth, they have built the world's largest factories, criss-crossed the continent with the longest and swiftest transportation lines, erected more big cities than any other nation in history, pierced the heavens with the tallest sky-scrappers ever known, rent the western hemisphere in twain by the greatest engineering feat in an engineering age, and produced the only billionaires in the annals of time. Let others who like to play with superlatives expand to their heart's content the list of things that the United States has done on an incomparable scale. Is it any wonder, then, that we are sometimes regarded as a nation of megalomaniacs?

maniacs? Is there any surprise that we have a quantitative civilization? The very force of circumstance has focused our eyes on things that have dimension—things to which we can apply the tape, the measuring rod, or the dollar. Ours has been thus far—at least for the last century—a conquest of *things—things* that can be perceived by one or more of the five senses—*material things—consumable things—perishable things—things* that can be bought and sold in the market place—important things, to be sure, but not sufficiently important to constitute the objectives of life. We literally worship at the footstool of the God of Matter; and we demand of our God that he make things big—bigger than any other god has ever made them. I dare say that if we should have to build another ark (and the prospect in the Panhandle seems quite remote just now) we should demand a structure ten times as big as Noah's. We would scour the earth for animals that the old patriarch never heard of and then put it in the morning headlines that we had old Noah skinned a city block.

Yes, ours is a dimensional civilization. The fact manifests itself in dozens of ways and in every phase of our lives. In the world of business and industry we have taken off our hats to the captain of big enterprise without inquiring as to the methods employed or the means he used to attain his position. The bigness of his business has blinded us to the quality of his work. From the standpoint of our dimensional civilization he is a successful business man, and being successful, he must be wise, powerful, great. The possession of wealth has become *prima facie* evidence of greatness. Under our standard, *success* has little relation to morals. The two are separately pigeon-holed, and we must not raise questions of ethics in building a big business. "Business is business," we say. What are human rights, what is freedom, what is equity, what are honesty and consideration for others, what is the Constitution of the United States, and what the articles of faith upon which it rests, what the common law of our states and of the nation itself, when business is involved? What is worthwhile anyway but success, and that defined in terms of measurable parts? Let the answer be found in the slums and sweatshops of our industrial and commercial centers, in the poverty of our farms, and in the hunger and nakedness of millions of our people. Let those who doubt that our "rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" have been challenged by a dimensional civilization read this morning's—any morning's—paper and count therein the records of crime. Where may we look today for safety? Where for that security that is essential to peace, prosperity, and happiness, when it is said, the armed criminals exceed in number the combined forces of our army and navy? On every hand stalks the phantom ghost of greed—greed for mere things; and greed, mind you, is at once the oldest and the youngest offspring of a quantitative age. It produced an Insull and bereft ten thousand innocent purchasers of

stock of their life savings. It raised up a Mitchell and quietly absorbed the wealth of multiplied thousands of those who trusted him and his institution. It ruined the consciences of business executives all over our nation, drove many of them to suicide, wrecked the fortunes of honest toilers, and shook the foundations and superstructure of our national economic system.

Time forbids that we do more than mention the fact that this same God of Magnitude has invaded the field of religion. We see it in the rivalries of sects for places of material advantage, in the erection of places of worship, in the ungodly theologies that offer us bargain-counter and horse-swapping religion, in the materialistic interpretation of spiritual processes and principles, and in the compartmentalization of our morals. Dimensional religion has come as a part of our dimensional civilization, and it is playing havoc with the church and with the spiritual health of our people.

Education, too, is a victim of this same mania for size. In many ways, schools have taken color from their social environment—a perfectly natural and proper thing to do, provided its results are consistent with the purposes for which schools are maintained. Unfortunately, our quantitative program has led us into many fallacious practices and for these society and the schools themselves are now having to pay. When we once accept size as a measure of value, we commit ourselves to the philosophy of materialism, for only matter has physical dimension. With size, number, quantity, volume, magnitude as evidence of worth, we naturally create materialistic objectives. We have told our children that they must become educated so they would not have to work so hard, thus setting up comfort and freedom from hardship as ends of education. We have told, with statistical exactness, how one's earning capacity is increased by pursuing education from one level to another, and have thus held many of them in high school and carried large numbers to and through college, with the single idea of increasing income. This sets up the accumulation of wealth as an educational objective, and makes property and things the motivating power in our lives. In order to make sure that every man should have a vocation and thus be able to earn a livelihood, we introduced so-called practical education into the curriculum of our schools. Again, the objective is dimensional, materialistic, and is likely to give the child the wrong philosophy of life.

Display, ostentation, big show—these are modifications of our quantitative interpretation of life, and so finishing schools flourish here and there, where girls take on a little varnish, inflate the ego, and imagine themselves educated. Many parents in this country are paying out hard-earned money for this sort of fool's gold. A kindred thing is to be found in athletics. Two-thirds of the people in this country measure a college, if not a high school, in considerable part by its percentage of winnings in football. You educators know

as well as I do that there are plenty of colleges in this country today whose secure place in the esteem of the people is due to the habit of winning athletic contests. The people, in no small degree, measure educational institutions by the spectacular aspects—another evidence of the fallability of our dimensional civilization.

This number concept has gotten such a footing in the management and financial support of our state institutions of higher learning that it is difficult for the ordinary college president to work on the qualitative problems of his institution. If he doesn't show bigness and increasing bigness year by year, the State cannot afford the expense of maintenance. Better close up, or reduce the offerings, or become, perchance, a regional junior college, or some other brand of educational dogie. A big per cent of the students must come a big distance, too—outside the 100 mile radius (note the dimension). Students who live 101 miles from college are so much smarter and better and more valuable to the State than those living only 99 miles away.

Had I the time, I could continue at considerable length, showing the coloration of education through its contact with a dimensional civilization. But the remainder of my time must be given to a consideration of education's responsibility for the redemption of a quantitative, materialistic age. Plainly, somebody, some agency, must lead the way out. The government, through the New Deal, is doing much, but, as President Roosevelt says, "This crisis can be met, but not in a day or a year, and education is a vital factor in the meeting of it." It seems evident to me that our whole civilization is suffering from disease—disease that has preyed upon us for generations. No mere mechanical treatment is going to last long. It is to be hoped that government and other agencies may be able to keep the patient alive until education, through the transfusion of ideals with an abiding value, can restore health and vigor for a new day of human progress based upon a general diffusion of knowledge and virtue among the masses of our people.

Toward the fulfillment of its obligations in this crisis education's first duty is to abandon many of its traditional objectives and step up on higher ground. We must find better values in education than escape from hard work. Such objectives were natural and proper in an age when the exactions of each day left one physically exhausted and without hope for sufficient rest to begin the next day's labors. It is utterly inadequate and improper in an age when men can't find labor to perform. The old objective tended to attach stigma to work and to stimulate white collar ambitions. Especially was this true of higher education, and this fact accounts for many of the slurs at colleges even in this day. Boys and girls must be taught to respect labor at all its levels provided it serves the needs of man; and they must find

in education a means of doing more and better work, motivated, for the most part, by social (not selfish) objectives.

Likewise, the personal pecuniary advantage of education, increasing with great rapidity from level to level, while having the merit of being true, is very low as an educational aim. It cultivates the acquisitive nature of men and sets up false standards of values. It fixes private gain as a life objective and develops a self-centered life program. It is anti-social in its implications in that it emphasizes getting rather than giving. It is doubtful if a system of education through tax support can be justified if its chief aim is to enable men to make money for their own uses only. The acceptance of an education at public expense imposes on the recipient a heavy obligation to society. The public has a right to expect a return on its investment when it foots the bill for my education. I am not at liberty to use my knowledge and skill, gained through education, to mulct society in my own interest.

Our so-called *practical* education falls under the same general condemnation. As too often taught, it leads the student to believe that vocational efficiency and employment are the ends of education—that education is something one learns and can use to material advantage. As commonly understood by the public, such subjects as manual arts, agriculture, home economics, *et cetera*, are simply means of introducing one successfully to an occupation. To be sure, the better teachers of these branches find in them cultural and social values, but these are the exception. In my opinion these subjects are not justifiable on the traditional bread and butter value they offer. They *can* be and they *must* be made a means of liberating and socializing the personality of the student. Education is not the accumulation of knowledge or the acquisition of skills. It is rather the development of human power, along with a disposition to use it for social ends. In the final analysis that education is most practical which leaves the individual student with the most vision. The practical and the ideal come together in any proper conception of the nature of education. We cannot hope through education to guarantee to every man a job, even during good times, but we can, through education rightly motivated, guarantee to a vast majority of men a residuum of culture—a philosophy of life—that will enable them to keep their feet on the ground in both adversity and prosperity.

Much will be said during this conference about the curriculum; and, so far as I know, the men who appear on this program are as near experts in this field as can be found in the nation. I hope I may be pardoned for a few observations in this connection. They have direct bearing upon the subject about which I speak. It must be apparent that I am trying to say that qualitative considerations must play a large part in the education for tomorrow. Whatever changes are to be made in our system of public schools,

they *must* seek to put different standards of value into life. Society cannot go forward under a dimensional civilization. Such a civilization is necessarily static and stagnant. If we are to move toward greater happiness and richer achievement, we must underpin our common life with a new order of intellectual and spiritual understanding. Certain changes in the curriculum will no doubt help. Among these, the following seem to be the most important :

(1) Greater emphasis upon those subjects which deal with human relations; and such subjects better integrated with the work-a-day world. The way to do this is a thesis in itself and doubtless will receive some attention from those who follow me.

(2) More emphasis upon those subjects which express the cultural achievement of the race. Reference is to the Fine Arts and Literature in particular. This is for its moral and inspirational value, its development of the emotional nature, and to furnish material for constructive leisure.

(3) More emphasis upon Health Education and recreation. The value of good health and how to keep it are essential considerations in thinking of the happiness and progress of the future. Recreational facilities must be widely expanded, even though it cost vast sums of money. Parks and playgrounds, set in nature's beauty spots and equipped for every type of wholesome outdoor play, will be as essential to our new education as are school houses, libraries, and laboratories; and all ages and types of people will frequent and enjoy them.

It is not, however, in the revised curriculum, or in any other external trappings of education, that we are to find chief hope for a New Day. I am not unfaithful to my profession when I say that by and large the weakest spot in our educational system is in the teaching personnel. For this the teachers are not to blame. They have probably done the outstanding piece of work among all our public servants; and the marvel is that under the conditions around us the teaching personnel is as good as it is. But society has not yet realized the crucial place the teacher occupies in our social organism. My own views on this subject are best expressed by Prof. Kilpatrick, of Columbia University, who says: "The teacher is the key to the actual educative process so far as we properly rely on the school to guide it."

Accordingly, Prof. Kilpatrick advocates, as a means of improving the quality of education, "a new social emphasis . . . in the professional preparation of teachers and other educators." In this connection he says: ". . . for some two decades now the dominant stress in study and research has been laid upon the scientific and impersonal aspects of education, with a resulting accumulation of technique and procedures which largely ignore any social outlook and bearing. Indeed the net effect has often been anti-social in that

many have been led to believe that a scientific and statistical treatment of facts as such would supply all needed direction and aim."

It would seem, then, that we are in danger of substituting our new instruments of education—*viz.*, techniques and skills—for the ends of education. Likewise, the tendency to "minimize the need for thinking" through the use of devices and measurements, is inimical to the proper aims of education. To quote Kilpatrick again: "If thinking could be done once and for all by a few experts and the results embodied in easily managed techniques, then, so the advocates of this position have thought, there need be no worry if teachers do not think. These expert results would supply any lack along this line, so that now at length could an inclusive business-like centralization of authority be effected. If a curriculum could be made at the top and thus handed down, and if standardized tests could measure the output, then managerial 'efficiency' would become as available for the school system as for any business organization." But no such managerial wisdom is or ever will be at hand. Much will depend in the future, even more than in the past, upon the resourcefulness, the industry, the attitudes and character qualities of the teacher. The child is a growing organism, constantly in a state of flux in its relation to the things about it. As Kilpatrick says: ". . . the pupils are during each class period building attitudes with reference to any and everything that enters significantly in whatever is then going on. Out of these attitudes grow interests and repulsions, and out of these in turn come life's decisions. It is a hard saying, but the teacher, so far as taking thought can affect results, is properly responsible for all these attendant attitudes just as truly as for the arithmetic—more so, if there be any difference, in the degree that the attitudes enter more significantly than do skills into the learner's life to direct it and give content to its decisions."

Now, attitudes come largely from the emotional nature. Education has been dealing too exclusively with mind, leaving emotion out of consideration. Here is a field which education must enter, explore, and exploit. Its understanding involves wide contacts, large experience, discriminating intelligence, patient study. But such understanding is as essential to good teaching as is the mastery of subject-matter, or the techniques of instruction. A teacher whose attitudes are sane and well-poised, whose own emotional life rests upon a constructive life philosophy, and who takes into account the emotional reactions of childhood, will probably have little difficulty in dealing with the attitudes and emotions of children; and he will be a competent teacher for a democratic and forward moving civilization. His pupils will comprehend and appreciate the invisible, intangible, dimensionless values of life that lie at the base of all great cultures and will, therefore, be competent and dependable citizens in a free and progressive republic. Such a teacher "will go forth as

an open-minded proponent of the public good, tied to no prior chosen plan, but intelligently aware of life's problems and difficulties, and tremendously concerned to help in their solution; able in interest at least to take hold in any community, however backward or however complacent; determined as far as in him lies not only to work with the children of the school but also to help the community study its own problems, in the light of the best he knows or can come to know, first on the community's own terms and then to move on as far and as fast as the argument may lead. Such is the social vision we hold for the preparation of teachers." And, when such teachers shall come to occupy a considerable majority of the places in our school rooms, education will do its part to substitute a qualitative for a dimensional civilization; and not until then, regardless of what else may be done, will there be essential improvement in our public school system.

I am any child. I was brought into a world made and ordered before me. I was not consulted regarding time, place, parents, home, or name. I am sent to a school and given teachers. I am a creature of nature and nurture. I am the center of a universe. Its waters flow into me where they will become salt and bitter because of no outlet. Or I may become a spring of living water and give health to my universe. My education determines which.

I am the link between past and future. I may lavish the culture and wealth of my progenitors and even mortgage my posterity for my enjoyment. Or I may enrich what the world has given me and my posterity will honor and revere my memory. My education determines which.

M. L. ALTSTETTER.